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HAPPINESS

Did anyone ever go out of life declaring himself totally unacquainted with happiness? And was there ever a human being who did not desire happiness? Man looks upon happiness as his natural heritage. Always he has been dreaming of some Utopia, always been searching for a Promised Land. Even with no expectation of lying on flowery beds of ease, he looks forward to some sort of felicity. His hope of Heaven is based on this belief in happiness. Though his craving for happiness has sometimes led him far astray, driving him to killing excesses, impelling him to fearful deeds, it has oftener been a restraining influence, an impetus to right-doing, an incentive to advancement.

At the beginning of human existence, man, to maintain life, was forced to secure for himself certain comforts,—food, shelter, warmth. These comforts were essential to happiness, no less than to life. Even the rudest mortal is sensible to comfort; and the greater one's refinement the more will one's comfort, and therefore one's happiness, be made or marred by one's material surroundings, the more will one demand an environment of perfect neatness and cleanliness, the more will one crave the sight of beauty. An ugly, dingy wall-paper may be positive torture, bringing one, it may be, to the point of tears. And yet, if one's days are spent in joyful labor and one's windows frame a glory of hill and vale, even the dingy walls may be endured.

Appetizing food, we have said, is a contributing factor in this matter of happiness. There is reason in the common saying that a man is good-natured after a good dinner. No man can go about his day's work with any vim or joy on an insufficient breakfast. The housewife who feeds her family well, catering thoughtfully to individual tastes and needs, is much more likely to have a happy, contented household than the woman who finds the planning of meals a trouble and leaves everything to servants. Ruskin's mother, we are told, was a consummate housewife, and we know that her gifted son counted it among his blessings that

he was early taught the meaning of peace. We may take as a good sign the present popularity of the domestic economy courses in the schools and colleges. There is hope in this revival of interest in household matters; for it is an indisputable fact that good housekeeping and good cooking are an aid to efficiency as well as a promoter of happiness.

Companionship is essential to the happiness of most people, though inability to content one's self in solitude is usually an indication of poverty of soul, and the dislike of being alone springs most often from a kind of vanity, a desire to have one's self-love gratified, a need of being constantly assured that one is a good fellow. A man like Thoreau can even delight in solitude, finding a sweet and beneficent society in nature, rejoicing when an early twilight ushers in a long evening in which many thoughts have "time to take root and unfold themselves." Even humble, patient, unlettered souls have sometimes possessed the secret of contentment in solitude. The matron told of by Wordsworth in the *Excursion* is an instance. This woman, an inhabitant of a remote hill farm, left alone through the three mid-winter months from the dark of early morning to the dark of evening, finds many sources of comfort and companionship,—her wheel, her fire, the ticking of the house-clock, the cackling hen, the tender chicken brood, the wild birds that gather round her porch, the sheep-dog's honest countenance. "And above all," she is made to say, "my thoughts are my support."

A life may be poor in happiness and yet rich in enjoyment. Ruskin's was such a life. The soul most susceptible to pleasure is often the least destined to happiness. The nature having the largest capacity for happiness may be the most sensitive to suffering. Happiness, moreover, is always something exquisite, and it is the nature of things exquisite to be fleeting, evanescent, easily dispelled. A settled happiness is as rare as a rhapsody of happiness; and when it exists it is usually a hard-won, well-earned calm.

We delight in the pleasure that comes seldom. When a busy, hard-working man declares that to play cards in the day-time is his idea of happiness, we know he means that the rare treat of doing something unusual gives him genuine pleasure; he does

not mean that his happiness depends on this day-time recreation. I have seen a business man, whose fate it was to do daily office work, take real pleasure during a holiday season in running the lawn mower. It is always a good sign, I think, when a preacher loves to go fishing. There was once a French queen who took to butter-making as a pastime. If it was truly a recreation, then there was virtue in the act. To the professional gambler, is it the game or the chance of gain that gives pleasure? Was any man of this profession—unless he happened to have a Becky Sharp for a wife—ever known to enjoy a quiet game in the bosom of his family?

We are always happier, I believe, for having been happy. One's nature gets set toward happiness. I repudiate the affirmation "That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." Even before the advent of old age, we are often cheered by the memory of happier days. One known characteristic of the French people is their elasticity of spirit. May not their social instinct, their domestic tendencies, their love of home, be at the root of this racial distinction? There is a significant passage (quoted by Ruskin in *Fors Clavigera*) in Marmontel's sweet picture of his own child-life. "What," he says, "in my memory is the chief charm of my native place is the impression of the affection which my family had for me, and with which my soul was penetrated in early infancy. If there is any goodness in my character, it is to these sweet emotions, and the perpetual happiness of loving and being loved, that I believe it is owing. What a gift does Heaven bestow on us in the virtue of parents!"

Marmontel's life was happy in the blessedness which George Eliot valued so highly. "A human life," she thought, "should be well-rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, . . . a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection." Mrs. Wharton tells us of Lillie Bart that she "had grown up without one spot of earth being dearer to her than another; there was no center of earthly pieties, of grave, endearing traditions, to which her heart could revert and from which it could draw strength for itself and tenderness for others."

The highest happiness is a kind of rapture, a kind of devotion;

it springs from passion of some sort, a passion for art, a passion for truth, a passion for gold, a passion for service. It is indeed a blessed thing that there are in this world persons who find happiness in doing for others. It is fortunate likewise that there are lovers of fact, persons possessed of a passion for research. Then there is the ecstasy of the poet (he delights even in poetic pains); the rapture of the dreamer; the joy of expression, in whatever medium; the pleasure of manipulation, whether one works with brush or pen, with words or colors.

Usually we love to do what we can do well. Sometimes, however, the desire is given without the power. There is a humorously pathetic instance of this state of things in Mrs. Freeman's story of the village poetess. This poor old maid's cry of disillusionment and grief comes often to me: "Had I ought to have been made with a wantin' to do, if I couldn't?" And here comes in the larger question, the question as to how far it is worth while to spend time and effort in the pursuit of an art for which one has no great gift, or whether the cultivation of mediocre powers is ever worth while. The answer, I think, depends entirely upon one's estimate of pleasure.

The delight that comes in doing what one can do well is a very genuine pleasure. I have a friend who is an accomplished cook, a maker of delectable dishes. "I am never happier," I have heard her say, "than when I have a lot of people to cook for." This preparing of feasts satisfies both her love of excellence and her love of achievement. It is the same passion, I suppose, that starts a man in search of the North Pole, or sets him to some work of invention, or some gigantic artistic or literary task, some history of Frederick the Great (for even Carlyle must have found some joy in his work, notwithstanding his woful plaint), or some statue of Perseus. The happiness springs from enthusiasm and from the gratification which comes through the exercise of power, energy, intellect, and deftness.

Some people are happy in idleness. These are dreamers for the most part, contentment in habitual idleness being usually a sign either of depravity and imbecility or of extraordinary powers of observation and reflection. The poet Wordsworth spent his days in unabashed idleness, and the world has cause to be

thankful that he was thus permitted to spend his time. John Milton, but for those thirty-one years of leisure and freedom, might never have produced his immortal poem. The number of poets who have been lost to the world because of the necessity of taking up some practical occupation, we shall never know. Neither can we know whether these unfortunate ones have been happier or otherwise in the unfulfillment of their powers.

That the passion of love, an almost universal passion, should bring supreme felicity to so few is still a fact to wonder over. It is rather curious that our noblest example of wedded bliss should be found among the poets, a class famous for their inconstancy of affection. It is strange, too, that fiction should afford so few examples of conjugal happiness. Novelists seem to be taken up with the depiction of love in its early stages, with the joys and vicissitudes of courtship. If there is any portrayal at all of matrimonial relations it is the wretchedness rather than the bliss that is set forth. So far as I can recall (I am speaking now of English fiction), Mrs. Craik's *John Halifax* and Arthur Christopher Benson's *Watersprings* are the only works of fiction in which there is any dwelling upon the sweetness of married love. It is certainly a theme worthy of the highest powers. If its development offers little excitement for the reader, it surely affords the nicest opportunity for the display of psychological insight on the part of the author. Is it that this perfect union of souls is too rarely realized in life to make the imaginative conception of it enjoyable? Alas, even the most ecstatic love has its admixture of grief; even a Romeo's joy is no more than "sweet sorrow."

But if the bliss of perfect companionship is denied, there is in most lives some share of enjoyment, often of a kind that approaches the level of happiness. We have all known days when just to breathe and enjoy the sunshine was happiness enough, days when cares and anxieties seemed to weigh less heavily, yea, were well nigh forgotten; days when a blessed peace seemed to settle over the spirit. A Wordsworth, unblessed with conjugal happiness, would still find joy in the fair sights of earth; Ruskin, denied the desire of his heart, found no less delight in mountain, sea, and sky, blue gentian and alpine rose.

A search in the storehouse of memory brings to light some strange antics, reveals some curious relics. A dear old lady whom I sometimes visit, when asked to recall from her own past some scene or moment of happiness, related briefly what seemed to me, until I had given the matter a little reflection, a rather trifling incident. My friend was raised on a farm, which included within its domain a choice bit of woods, through which a crystal-clear stream ran merrily. A cedar-lined lane led to this little dell. At the end of the lane, the ground sloped steeply toward the mossy banks of the stream. Wandering down this lane one day with a group of children, whose impulse it was to run down the hill, the lady suggested that they roll down; accordingly the game was played, to the delight of all. The performance, on the part of that grown woman, was a wholesome piece of childlike abandon, a wholesome revival of the spirit of childhood. The incident was therefore quite worthy of remembrance. A backward look into my own past discovered to me, much to my surprise, just such a frolicsome moment, the scene of it standing out in clearest outline and sparkling in purest sunshine. It was the simple pleasure of lying buried in warm sand on the sunny slope of a dune, and of sliding down after a time for another dip in the sea. There must be something of the savage and something of the child in all of us, some primitive instinct that makes us delight, sometimes even to the end of life, in this sort of nearness to nature and this sort of freedom from restraint.

It is a significant fact that every person of whom I have made this request for recollections of felicitous spots of time has recounted out-of-door pleasures, having their source in the beautiful sights and sounds of earth. When these wonders have been enjoyed in happy companionship, they remain in memory as spots of sunshine. One friend recalled a Florida day. The occasion was an excursion, made in company with a dearly-loved brother, from Miami to one of the Keys. A memorable feature of the scene was its wonderful beauty of color. "I had never dreamed," said my friend, "that the ocean could put on such a tint of sapphire." She walked over the little isle searching for new plants, and found several. On the way home there came up

Hence, amid ills that vex and wrongs that crush
 Our hearts that peace

 Which passeth understanding."

These are the words, and yet how seldom has their truth been realized? Is it that our spiritual sympathies and affections are quickened only through suffering? Is it only when we can say,—

"A deep distress hath humanized my soul,"—

that we know true blessedness?

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